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ABSTRACT

Composition researchers and teachers grant that the relationship of non-verbal thinking and language plays a crucial role in the writing of fiction and poetry, but they are sometimes reluctant to perceive that non-verbal thinking must, necessarily, be crucial, with different emphases, in the thinking/writing processes of rhetoric. Activities and coachings that relate the non-verbal and verbal capacities in classroom/conference practice are needed. Critical to the process of developing successful argumentation and other extended discourse relevant to written composition are the following non-verbal areas: (1) mental imagery; (2) gestural expression; (3) pattern perception of instances of imagery; (4) the abstractive leap; (5) sense of audience; (6) point of view, including attitude and affect about subject and argument; (7) spatializing--the use of the dimension of space to group, discover, and relate instances of perception and patterns of instances; (8) sense of movement and rhythm, sense of story, or organizing movement; (9) sense of form; and (10) synaesthesis--the use of one sense to explore another sense to develop metaphor. When it comes to the discourse of practical and imaginative life, neither non-verbal thinking nor verbal expression can usefully exist without the other. Though the capacities exist potentially separate in the mind, the most natural and frequent way for thinking of any kind to be expressed is through the medium of language. (MS)

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Voice, Image, and Idea: The Use of Non-Verbal Perception in the Development of Extended Discourse

In The Shattered Mind Howard Gardner cites the example of Mr. Gorgan, a man whose brain was damaged in such a way that he spoke, rattled on, one meaningless grammatical sentence after another. "The man bites the dog" was the same to Mr. Gorgan as "The dog bites the man." This may remind us of compositions that are completely grammatical and, when we are trying to read them, bring us screaming out of our chairs because they seem to entrap us in meaninglessness, unreadability, lack of the imaginative dimension of writing and reading. The fact that language can exist entirely divorced from meaning is yet another suggestion that language may drift or be forced apart from the capacities which give it meaning. Allan T. Paivio has developed the dual-coding model, mental imagery as one code and language as the other. Bronowski finds that the meaning of language is built first from mental imagery. Vygotsky describes "inner speech" as combining flashing sights and "predication," a rapid interplay among images, words, feelings, "a fluttering between word and thought," a sense of thoughts that escape or miscarry words, and, we may add, the outright sounding or dramatizing of speech. Gardner tells us that writing appears to be the most complex of all skills because damage

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to any area of the brain in some way affects writing. All of this suggests that either much of thinking, and perhaps the most important part of it, is non-verbal, or that we are really speaking of interplay, inter-connection, inter-penetration of several capacities that are dispersed in right and left hemispheres and various lobes of the brain. Composers of music speak of seeing colors, of their minds being strongly activated by colors and feeling for colors, prior to and during their composing process. This seems to parallel the mental sights, perceptions, and affective feelings that precede and occur during the process of writing. Finally many writers, Auden and Forster among them, have been quoted as saying, "How can I know what I think until I see what I write?" This discovery process appears to occur because writing is particularly able to access most areas of thinking that would ordinarily be called non-verbal. Non-verbal thinking provides much of the content and meaning of language and many of the tools for shaping and presenting written composition.

Linguistic approaches alone are not sufficient to comprehend and deal with the relationship of meaning and language. Composition researchers and teachers grant, with only small caveat, that the relationship of non-verbal thinking and language plays a crucial role in the writing of fiction and poetry, but are sometimes reluctant to perceive that non-verbal thinking must, necessarily, be crucial, with

different emphases, in the thinking/writing processes of rhetoric.

Seeing of image, pattern perception, affective and intuitional perception, metaphor, visual configuration thinking and clustering, comparison and contrast of instances and patterns, supporting imagery, perception of point of view, and relational thinking, are crucial to the process of developing successful argumentation and other extended discourse. The theater of composition of the mind itself is, in its structure, partly non-verbal. Imagined sense of audience is first intuitional and affective. Perception of basic, verbally realized forms and modes, such as image, sequence and process, and models of patterns of behavior are, as other structural and pattern perception, partly non-verbal. We see to solve and solve to see, with non-verbal processes in interplay with language.

You probably have had the experience of remembering vividly the gesture that someone, perhaps a mechanic or repairman, used in telling you how something occurred or how something was done. You may remember--<u>see</u> the gesture in your mind--long after the words are forgotten. The mental representation persuades--argues--what it has to say. The non-verbal concept communicated by gesture in oral telling is communicated by image, verb, metaphor, comparison in writing. Again and again students do their first effective writing when they are coached to "see" an event, process,

instructional how-to, imagined concept, or dream clearly in their minds and tell it (orally and in writing) so someone else can see it too. Image "speaks" to us non-verbally, pushing across to our internal awareness the abstractive image relationships that take our attention. Because of the persuasive "push" of our seeing in the mind, because of its intention to be communicated, we need to involve the audience. Inherently persuasive and argumentative in nature, our mental seeing pulls magnetically upon language and gesture, with an urgency of sense of address and a pressure for precision, to express perceptions to ourselves and to others.

Teachers of writing have often observed that students' breakthrough writings, from basic writers on up, are usually characterized by the writers' feelings of having "something to say," which helps them to solve their problems and challenges more effectively. The relational clustering of patterns of perceptions and affective feelings about them constitute having "something to say." Though language and meaning in language are built in interplay with seeing-in-the-mind, they are two separate capacities. They often drift or are forced unnaturally apart, with generally adverse effects upon oral and written communication. We need activities and coachings that relate the non-verbal and verbal capacities in classroom/conference practice.

I will list areas that are usually called non-verbal and then discuss them and their relevance to written composition.

1) Mental imagery

2) Gestural expression

3) Pattern perception of instances of imagery

4) The abstractive leap

These first four areas of non-verbal thinking could be grouped under content and sense of something to say, pressing for verbal expression. The next six areas are non-verbal mental instruments for facilitating the exploration, organization, and expression of the first four, though these six areas often work in a seamless combination with the first four.

5) Sense of audience. We see, feel, sense, imagine, and empathize with another person or larger audience in a thousand non-verbal ways that are important to writing.

6) Point of view, as found in both fiction and expository writing, and including attitude and affect about subject and argument.

7) Spatializing--the use of the dimension of space to group, discover, and relate instances of perception and patterns of instances.

8) Sense of movement and rhythm, sense of story or organizing movement.

9) Sense of form--Baudelaire observed that form has an independent power of its own to elicit and shape expression.

10) Synesthesia--the use of one sense to explore another sense to develop metaphor.

We can approach and cultivate each one of these areas with specific suggestions, coachings, exercises, activities, and assignments. We should do so with the awareness that these kinds of thinking seldom or never exist isolated from each other in ordinary discourse. For instance, the image seen in the mind will have an inherent form, may be expressed in language and gesture, involves sense of audience and point of view, may use one sense to find the metaphor for another sense, may be the first in a series that produces a model, and may trigger a sense of organizing movement.

1) Mental imagery, seeing in the mind, is commonly mentioned as being non-verbal, yet it finds its most ready and most natural expression in oral-gestural speech and in writing. In The Visionary Eye, Jacob Bronowski says "that all important work in the arts and in science consists exactly in fashioning in one's head a hypothetical situation which can overleap the intervening space and be reformed in the head of somebody else..." so the receiver can act accurately upon the information carried by the image. Seeing in the mind, broader than mental imagery, includes visualization, conceptualization, symbolization, perception

from the other senses, empathy, sense for points of view, the capacity for making concepts and the connections between concepts, as well as pictorial seeing in the mind. Yet we should seldom expect to see our mental seeing like a film unrolling in our minds. Such strictly pictorial seeing would thoroughly inhibit our full seeing and solving processes that involve both concretion and abstraction. Virginia Woolf, in a letter discussing her process of writing, says that a passage begins with an image, with something she sees, and with the "wave" of feeling that comes from the mental seeing, urging itself into writing. She makes it clear that this process is initially non-verbal. Vygotsky, to describe thought, uses the image of the barefoot boy in a blue shirt chasing down the street.

Imagery plays a central role in the accumulation of instances and patterns of instances for scientific and rhetorical thinking and expression, and in the patterns of instances that develop into concepts and argumentative point of view for extended discourse. If we are interested in writing that gets its message across to an audience vividly, stably, effectively, then we ought to be interested in mental imagery.

We will find ourselves necessarily discussing seeing-in-the-mind when we deal with virtually any of the other areas of non-verbal thinking. We see to solve and solve to see. Seeing in the mind is inherently inventive. It exerts a

magnetic urging upon gesture and language. We can coach writers to "See it" and to write what they see. Vivid mental seeing stimulates voice. We can discover that when students see clearly what they're writing about, their expression becomes better-formed. We can find that involving students in their thinking, in their seeing in the mind, involves them productively in the problem-solving of written discourse.

2) Gestural expression. The more vivid our seeing, the more involuntary and precise are the gestures that accompany our oral telling of the imagery. Here is the beginning of an essay on the making of lasagna:

> To fully appreciate the Italian flair for creating works of intricately interdependent layers, levels, strata, and tiers, examine a pile of several kinds of fruit in any Italian grocery, or St. Peter's Cathedral, or the Mafia, or The Church, or Dante's Inferno. Lasagna is built somewhat along the same principle.

When you see this imagery in your mind and tell it orally to someone, you probably stack one hand on top of another and use other gestures to indicate "layers, levels, strata, and tiers." This gesturally discovered perception provided the author with the generating imagery, metaphorical principle, and point of concentration for building the entire essay.

Gesture and other para-lingual expression are "embedded" in our use of language. Gestural imagery stays firmly and vividly in the long-term memory. We invent correspondences

to get gestural perception into writing. We use metaphors, comparisons, verbs, and other devices. We deprive speech and writing of an important area of thinking and expression when we try to suppress gesture. Often, when we're hunting for an appropriate expression for our perception, a verb, a metaphor, we gesture impulsively to see what we're trying to say in our minds, to try out, seek, and find the words we want. When I was thinking of Vygotsky's concept of "inner speech," I found myself visualizing a rapid current, and my hand with the pen came up gesturing seekingly, involuntarily, as I tried out verbs, and "rushing itself along" came to mind, though I felt that was only an approximation of what I perceived. When we gesture, we utilize motion and design, of hands and the rest of our bodies, to describe concepts in three-dimensional space. Gesture is strongly related to audience and audience needs. Gesture functions for us, as it functioned for early peoples, to give precise imaginative seeing, concepts, verb connections and qualifications, reactions, points of view, and so forth.

3) Pattern perception. We see in our mind groupings or clusterings of like and unlike instances, anomalous instances and patterns, and juxtapositions of groupings. For my book about the Chicago Conspiracy trial, Motion Will Be Denied (New York: William Morrow, 1972), I had to deal with notes taken over six months of trial (a box-full of notebooks), 20,000 pages of transcript, and other observations. I saw

patterns of instances of laughter, of how laughter revealed people's political dispositions, so that you could begin to see who was for the defense when they laughed at wit of the defense, who was for the prosecution. This was particularly useful in my observation of the jury, which had much puzzled everyone. The patterns leaped into a basic inter-actional and narrative principle, and I called a major section of the book "The Struggle for the Laugh in the Courtroom." The story began to develop out of this discovery of patterns and meaning in patterns.

In George Shaller's writings about the mountain gorilla we find a clear model of field observations and journal entries, leading to discovery of patterns. We can see how the instances of field observations and more-developed journal entries led to the behavioral study of the mountain gorilla, written for a professional audience, and to the book The Year of the Gorilla written for a general audience. The journal entries, accomplished pieces of writing in themselves, provide the instances for the perception and discovery of patterns, which led to writings addressed to different audiences, for which many of the instances became examples and illustrations as well as general background. We see similar principles at work in the writings of Darwin, Freud, Frazer, Jane Goodall, and a host of other writers, scientific, popular, literary.

In pattern perception, we compare and contrast, divide and classify, perceive sequence and process. This interplay between non-verbal and verbal ways of thinking and expression is precisely the sort of interplay that we need to develop strongly in our work with composition students, involving them in journal or "instance" writing on subjects that "take their attention," that they have been drawn to choose, about which they feel they "have something to say." They accumulate many instances in journal entries, much as Darwin accumulated instances in the journal he kept on the Beagle. These entries, like Shaller's, have value in themselves. Soon the students can be coached to try grouping the entries into patterns that "take their attention." I will discuss soon some of the non-verbal ways of thinking that we can use to perceive patterns and discover organization of instances.

4) The abstractive leap--that is, the inductive leap from the perception and development of patterns appears to be initially non-verbal or to be rushed along by the "predication," the forward organizing current of the interplay between speech and non-verbal perception. We can help these "leaps" occur by putting ourselves in the way of the instances and patterns of instances, by laying them out or approaching them through other non-verbal modes.

The following six areas of non-verbal thinking have great power for eliciting and organizing content.

5) Sense of audience. The sense of audience that we feel in our mental rehearsal prior to and during the actual process of writing involves the "predication" of inner speech that Vygotsky speaks of, "the fluttering between thought and word." It may be non-verbal to begin with, the way we see, feel, sense, empathize with another person in a thousand non-verbal ways (eye contact, the lifting of eyebrows, bodily expression, tone, and so on). A young girl who writes to her mother, a familiar audience for her, produces more extended discourse in better form than when she writes for academic audiences. John Steinbeck spoke of needing the feeling of writing for a friend, imagining a friend to whom he was telling the stories (sometimes his editor, Pascal Covici). As in gesturing to find verbs and metaphors, we are stimulated to find words to meet the non-verbally perceived needs and potentials of the audience. A physical sense of audience has a strong, almost convulsively organizing effect, causing us to mentally grab for whatever we sense the audience needs. It is one of the non-verbal tools that we can use, particularly the use of the immediate audience of the classroom to help students imagine audiences when writing alone and to organize the instances accumulating in their journals and inclass writing. It helps them combine imagined friendly audiences with critical ones.

6) Spatializing--that is, the use of the dimension of space to lay out instances and see what groupings form,

allowing the writer to dwell on the relationships among the patterns. Storyboards, lists, plot-trees, and the clustering techniques developed by Gabrielle Rico use the dimension of space to explore and develop patterns and progressions that would ordinarily be developed linearly in time. Or we can use the floor. In writing Motion Will Be Denied, I used the floor of my basement studio to lay out instances according to their similarities or any other notion that took my attention and watched patterns develop. I could sit in my chair or stand and move around the papers, meditating on the various groupings. I discovered patterns for sections, chapters, theses of arguments, structure of sections, and so forth.

Here are two examples of the kinds of lists that help a writer get a feeling, early in the process, for shaping a movement of written discourse. Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary the following list as she began shaping a chapter in her biography of Roger Fry:

> Suppose I make a break after H's death (madness).
> A separate paragraph quoting what R. himself said.
> Then a break.
> Then begin definitely with the first meeting.
> That is the first impression: a man of the world, not a professor or bohemian. Then give facts in his letters to his mother.
> Then back to the second meeting.
> Pictures: talk about art. I look out of the window.
> His persuasiveness--a certain density--wished to persuade you to like what he liked.
> Give the pre-war atmosphere. Ott. Duncan. France
> Letter to Bridges about beauty and sensuality.
> His exactingness. Logic.
>
> Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1953), p. 292.

A student's list for a personal narrative essay went like this:

Dislocated elbow
Biting through my tongue
Hippo Diorama
Swimming underwater while stoned
Green shit
Time magazine
Mandarin Orange Fruit Salad
Lake Shore Drive
Velcro
Nausea
Chewing ice cubes
Taking short cut across cars in a parking lot
Throwing a toad into an enraged group of ants
Sniffing burlap
Rats in the haystack

John Schultz, Writing From Start to Finish Teacher's Manual (Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook, 1983), p. 81.

Such lists generally follow a rough movement of material from beginning to end, a movement that is first perceived non-verbally, sensed with the mixed "predication" of inner speech.

Spatialization may help the writer come to the clean thrust of the inductive leap.

7) Point of view, attitude, affect about a subject, taking a persona, taking the point of view of other characters, particularly our opposites, especially the unfriendly ones. I initially wrote my long story "Morgan" (The Tongues of Men, Big Table, 1969) in a first-person draft that simply did not work. I laid it aside. A few months later, while walking down a street, I began to see and feel

vividly the event as overall storyteller and from Morgan's vantage point and point of view, definitely an unfriendly opposite. A strong undeniable sense of story movement and meaning took hold and imaginatively rearranged the entire story, which leapt into life. The strong imaginative experience of taking his point of view was non-verbal.

In non-fiction, the stance toward the subject, how close the teller will be, the feeling for using the pronouns of address, is a non-verbal sensing of differing distances and degrees of empathy. In writing the section "The Struggle for the Laugh in the Courtroom," the chance to be dispassionately distant yet empathetic toward two sides, while actually historically favoring one side, was felt by me in terms of imagined spatial distances, stance affecting tone, and was not only the challenge but also the way that I discovered the organizing movement. You can coach writers to see and imaginatively take a character's point of view. You can coach students to use imagined distancing to discover tone and attitude toward subject matter in inclass telling, writing, and reading.

8) Sense of movement, sense of story movement, is closely allied with sense of audience, point of view, and the push toward communication that comes from mental imagery. V. Woolf spoke of the "wave" of feeling that came from the imagery in her mind. This wave of feeling carries a sense of physical motion into the writing, a "sense of story," of

"story movement." When I took the point of view of Morgan, a strong current of movement carried from the image into the story, similar to what some composers of music experience as the wave of feeling and movement that comes from the vivid activation of color in their minds. This forward motion, this "sense of story movement," is often related to a strong sense of anticipated audience, as much a physical as a verbalized feeling.

In an essay about smells (fragrances, odors), a prose forms student had finally developed so many personally observed and researched through reading instances, a "room-full" as she put it, that, when she tried to organize them in groupings, they would not cluster in helpful ways. She finally set them all aside and one night wrote from memory, with just "a sense of story and movement to go on," sensing the responsive audience of the class. With no plan, she let herself be pulled along by what she called a "story sense," a non-verbal movement. In one sitting of several hours, she wrote a long draft from beginning to end.

Mark Twain's Life on the Mississippi, read in the class, shoved her how Twain used "story sense" to handle non-linear instances, and this helped her. An inclass rewrite activity in which she addressed a new beginning as a letter to another student in the class, a student she felt gave her a friendly challenge, helped, too. She, then, referred back to her original researched material to fill in, check out, all the

details and the citations. In her completed process, we see the full cooperation of the non-verbal and verbal capacities. "Smells: An Essay," by Sandra Goplin, is published in Hair Trigger 9 & 10. This "story sense," or sense of story movement, as much physically felt as verbalized, helps us to organize impressions and observations in a meaningful flow. Virginia Woolf, William Styron, and other writers have noted that the feeling that comes from what they see in their minds has much to do, in interplay with syntax, with nuance, flow, and rightness of rhythm, though syntax would usually be considered to be the sacred holding of the very verbal Broca's area of the left brain. You can coach writers to trust this sense of movement, "trust it," let it move, listen to the movement of their voices.

9) Sense of form and rhetorical design, as the cohering relationships of image, is perceived non-verbally. There is form that emerges from the subject matter and form that acts as eliciting blueprint or dynamic design. When Baudelaire observed that form has an independent power of its own to affect, guide, and shape thinking and verbal expression of thinking, he appeared to be saying that not only does form emerge from content but that it has an independent power to elicit content for filling its demands. There is a kind of abstract geometry to many poetic forms, the sonnet and sestina, for instance. There are naturally occurring characteristics for how-tos, sequence and process, and other

basic literary forms. Emergent form, coming out of the exploration of content, is frequently a matter of grasping in air for organization as we jump from one non-verbal perch to another. Emerging and potential forms are often discovered in the perceptions of patterns, through the use of spatializing techniques to see what groupings of instances can tell us, through the inductive abstractive leap, "story sense" and story movement--in the process itself of writing to see what we think. The very nature of writing requires us to think in terms of the integration of rhetoric and process. Sense for form can be developed through intensive oral and silent reading and Recall and Comment exercises, in which the comment often springs from non-verbal perception.

10) Synethesia, the use of one sense to explore another sense for metaphor (smell what we see, hear what we taste) produces fresh and engaging perceptions and ideas for writing. There are Story Workshop exercises that directly develop such thinking and expression, using one sense to explore sensations of another sense, such as hearing the word "sour" and responding with another word. Once again, a non-verbal process is stimulated by verbal suggestion and coached by the teacher. Processes of listening to sounds, tracing the gestural shape of the sound, seeing what the gestural shape of the sound reminds you of, what image does this shape suggest, and on into writing, are examples of synethesia.

Without so-called non-verbal thinking, written composition isn't going to amount to much. Without it, verbal expression tends toward the rattling-on emptiness and lack of relevance of poor Mr. Gorgan's grammatical but meaningless speech. In effect, when it comes to the discourse of practical and imaginative life, neither non-verbal thinking nor verbal expression can usefully exist without the other. Those situations which require us to deliberately not say what we mean--alluding to Lewis Carroll's perception here--illustrate the potential impact of both "non-verbalized" and non-verbal thinking upon the expression, the audience, and the speaker. Though the capacities exist potentially separate in the mind, the most natural and frequent way for thinking of any kind to be expressed is through the medium of language. We can cultivate it effectively in classroom and conference procedures and tremendously strengthen the teaching of composition.